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URBANISM INFLUENCES RURAL LIVING

Broadcast by Madge J. Reese, Federal Extension Service, Wednesday, November 9, 1938, in the home demonstration period, National Farm and Home Program, by 99 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company

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KADDERLY:

As I listened to that conversation between Mrs. Ricker and Miss Thomas from New York I was impressed by the fact that one of the most potent influences on farm life today, and one that will continue in an increasing degree, is the spread of urban standards to farm people.

You will be interested I am sure in some observations on that point, from a woman who has been in position to see this trend and the things responsible for it. That woman is Miss Madge J. Reese of the Department of Agriculture's Extension Service.

Miss Reese will tell us about some of the things she has noted in her years in extension work that indicate the spread of urban influences to rural living.

REESE:

Mr. Kadderly has given me a very large subject....but I'll cover the more significant things that occur to me.

In the first place the automobile, followed by good roads, has extended the travel of many farm families and widened their horizons. The farm family goes to town more frequently, observes the dress and manners of urban people, sees the enticing window displays, learns how urban people live; and the farm boys and girls are attending high schools in urban centers. On the other hand, the urbanite is motoring and becoming better acquainted with the countryside. The Extension Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the State Agricultural Colleges have a big responsibility in interpreting desirable urban standards and their proper application to country conditions. Perhaps this can best be done as it is being done through Home Demonstration Work because of the frequent and friendly contacts of the home demonstration agents with the farm women and the farm homes.

The migration of farm youth to cities and towns has been the result of greater use of farm machinery and the increasing use of power in farming, associated with a birth rate in the farm population higher than that needed to maintain the farm population permanently stationary. It is estimated by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics that there was a net migration of 6,000,000 people in the decade 1920-1929 from the farms to urban centers. During the period 1930-1934 the net migration from the farms was only about 600,000 because of the back-to-the-farm trail during the depression.

Dr. O. E. Baker of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics points out to us that migration from the farms, largely made up of youth and middle age, has a great economic significance. Few of us realize the magnitude of the contribution which the farming people have made to the productivity and prosperity of the cities and towns in the feeding, clothing and educating of the young people who leave the farms. This movement of wealth from the farms to the urban centers is one of the reasons,

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with several others, why so few farm homes have bathrooms, electric lights and other modern conveniences; why the farm houses built in recent years in some sections of the country are not as large nor as substantial as those built a century or more ago. Wealth has not accumulated on the farms from generation to generation, and in many cases farm debts, as well as inheritance of estates, have resulted in transfer of land ownership to urban residents, with consequent increase in farm tenancy.

The training boys and girls get in 4-H Club Work, and the extension activities in which young men and women participate, are planned to encourage a higher appreciation and a more intelligent understanding of farming and its needs. When farm-produced men and women with proper training back of them make their way into the forums where industrial, commercial, and legislative policies are evolved and discussed, they can be more likely depended upon to ask the question, "What will be the effect upon agriculture and farm life?"

There is no escaping the fact that the buying power of the farmer needs to be increased before a satisfactory standard of living can be attained by the greater number of farm families. All forces interested in rural America and the general prosperity of the country are directing their energies toward bringing this about. However, farm women as a rule are sensible and practical and are not attempting to build up false standards because of their becoming better acquainted with city folks and their homes.

Through the home demonstration program, farm women are learning to bring art into everyday life through attractive serving of good food, appropriate design and color in clothes made at home or purchased, artistic taste in simple and inexpensive home furnishings, and through the beauty of plantings around the farm house and throughout the countryside. Appreciation of good music and pictures, exchange of books and magazines, development of hobbies, community pageantry and plays, all are coming in for increased attention by the farm women. These things need not be only urban satisfactions, but those of farm families as well, and the million farm women who are members of the 45,000 home demonstration groups realize that, and are working toward such goals. As the rural sections become more urbanized in their desires, it would be a great loss if many of the sterling native values of rural life are not preserved.

We believe one of the most important things that farm women are accomplishing with home demonstration guidance is that they are making themselves creators of circumstances and are not just creatures of circumstances.

KADDERLY:

Well, Miss Reese, we did give you a large subject --- and in these few minutes you touched several points that I wish we could develop in more detail.